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Letter, 1972 March 30, Fred F. Marshall to Editor Pitkin

Fred F. Marshall

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March 30 ,1972

Editor

The American Legion Magazine
1345 Avenue of America
New York City, N. Y. 10019

Dear Editor Pitkin :

Legion Magazine

I have just read with avid interest the story appearing in the July, 1971 - "OUR FANTASTIC SHIPBUILDER IN THE WAR OF 1812". By Harvey Ardman, the same having been drawn to my attention by a World War I Buddy of mine and with our both receiving basic military training at Sacket's Harbor ^{Madison} Barracks post, on Lake Ontario in 1918.

As members of the Photo Divsn., Aviation Section, Signal Corps we were quartered at this historical post at the little hamlet of Sacket's Harbor, some 10 miles NW from Watertown, N. Y. I recall it was a beautiful, orderly military post with a row of brick troop quarters barracks strung along the lake shore, with well groomed lawn-like parade grounds and with another row of stone Officers' Quarters rimming the southward boundary of the grounds. There was also a theatre and Gym and Social center building.

I recall that we staged, on Memorial day a show of close-order drill routine and with thousands of spectators assembling from Watertown and surrounding areas. We also staged a stellar Minstrel performance in Watertown's Principal Opera House theatre and with proceeds going to the Red Cross and Liberty Bond drive. We also staged other Liberty Bond drives on the Main Square and I still marvel to this day, the extent of patriotic fervor and universal response to these campaigns. I recall too how hospitably all of us were welcomed by the populace of this entire sector. Invitations were received by the hundreds from people who wished to open their homes to us and with sumptuous meals. I know I speak for all of the others in our outfit that of those of us still extant, there remains a warm spot for these wonderful, patriotic staunchly American folk.

There were a number of notable figures in our outfit and drawn from the photographic field--- many cameramen from the Cinema Industry, as well as notable press photographers, photographer---writer notables, artists, etc. One--Whittlesey, a youthful artist took on the chore of painting a new drop curtain for the post theatre, and in this I was Whittlesey's assistant. I also was adept at cartooning and the Watertown Newspaper carried a feature story of our Memorial Day, close order drill contest and depicting our Company under the colorful, regular Army taskmaster Drill Sergeant -- "Spud Murphy", "bringing home the bacon"--- that is, the trophy *competition* we won as the best drilled and performing company in the competition.

Sacket's Harbor ^{Madison} Barracks was situated within the sheltered Harbor, off the open Lake, and which mile or more wide estuary carried on eastward some 6 to 8 miles and to the mouth of the Black River. A bunch of us pitched in to make up a kitty large enough for us to rent a venerable one-lunger motor launch and we would make

2 regular trips on Saturday evenings up to the little village at the mouth of Black River. We learned of some secret "speakeasy" Oases and had a real ball on the way home, singing songs and general hellraising.

Another time a group of us were invited to call over to the far shore of the harbor, and where there were several houses and a small country church. We were promised a feed and homemade strawberry pies and strawberry shortcake. The countryside of this whole northern New York region was covered with reaches of wild strawberries which ripened in June. They had a flavor far superior to the cultivated variety. Also in late spring, several species of fish would migrate from the lake into the small creek which coursed through the Barracks grounds. We could catch them by gunny-sacks full by hand or wire snares. Our mess sergeant would treat our troop to a fish fry, providing we dressed the fish out and thoroughly scaled them.

Following our basic military training we were split up for further photo training, some to U. of Cornell, others to the Kodiak plant at Rochester, and a larger number to the School of Cinematography at Columbia University. I was of this latter contingent. I recall that we were billeted in the former Choir Boys Home at the site of the Cathedral of St. Johns -The Divine --Amsterdam Ave & 116th, N. Y. City. The Cathedral was only partially constructed at the time, and with only an expanse of open, concrete floor base to the front. Our troop used this for morning callisthenics, and before we had chow and would march across to the class rooms at Columbia U. I can recall quite well, how on Sabbath mornings, and with side windows and doors open, we could hear, in the completed portion of the cathedral, the several hundred Choir Boys singing the Star Spangled Banner. To this day, I well recall the emotional reaction this great choral group awakened in us as we were held spellbound by the very power, fervor, and depth of feeling these youngsters put into the National Anthem. And so now I find myself with many misgivings, and with no little sadness, to realize that somewhere along the line America has let its ideals, its regard of a cherished heritage slip away---and perhaps never to be regained again.

After completion of this course at Columbia we were again split up. A good number were to go into the Aviation phase as aerial photographers, but the Aviation program continued to lag. Like most of us, anxious to get overseas and into the thick of things--(And take note of THIS as another trait peculiar to the times) I got the opportunity to get into the Historical photography branch, and which was to be given the job of obtaining a photographic record for posterity of A. E. F. participations and which of course included that of first hand, front line action. Our headquarters were in the Vincennes Section of Paris, in the factory of the notable Pathe Freres (Bros). We were billeted not far away in the Pathe Chateau. It was the plan that we would work out of this Signal Corps Laboratory in groups of three, with Camera equipment and a Motor Lorry. Some of this, particularly the Movie Cameras were bulky and awkward--resting on a tripod and cranked by hand. Of "still camerass" there was but a very few of the new Graflex order, and for most part we were expected to get front line action with a 5 x 7 bellows view camera, resting on a tripod and with use of the proverbial black cloth shield. Even so, we managed to get something for the record. After the war, these odds and ends of film clips were spliced into about 4 full reels under the heading "Flashes of Action". The last I heard of these there were among the archives of the War College. But more recently I've been informed it has been transferred to other repository.

To conclude, I'd like writer-historian Harvey Ardman to know, that one day while a group of us were seated around on the high cliff-rimmed knoll overlooking the mouth of the harbor, one of the boys punching around in the soil with a stick uprooted a ball, about 1½ to 2 " diameter---possibly of the "grape" category. I recall that it inspired us to try to find more of the early history of Sachet's Harbor. Later on we came across a large storage, at the base of the cliff, near the boat landing area, of the early day mortar cannon wood swivel bases. I would presume these had remained there, and unsheltered from weather since the stirring day of 1812.

To complete the account of my stint, I was, for what reason I never learned, called to the CO's office and requested to get my gear together and accompany the officer to whom I was introduced. I was told, I was to go on detached service and that I'd be given full instructions at the proper time.

I was taken to the A. E. F. hdqts at the Hotel Crillion, at the Place de la Concorde, (Paris), then escorted to a male haberdashery and fitted out in "mufti" (Civilian togs). I was then put aboard a train, and which would transport me as far as the tracks were still open to traffic---the medieval town of Brugge, along the No. Sea in Flanders. Here I was given orders to pick up a "Courrier Car" and which would transport me thence to the Flanders-Holland border.

I found out later that since Holland, at this stage was still in a Neutral-nation status no member of the Allied military could be admitted. Hence, so that I might be cleared to get into the country, papers had been given me designating that I was an American civilian borne on special mission. The only military that could get in were those such as Embassy, or Legation staffers or Couriers.

I was admitted with no complications or delays. The Courier car proceeded on to the Netherland's capital city of The Hague. My destination was the office of the Military Attache', of the American Legation.

I served here in the Military Attache hdqts, 64 Lange Voorhout, and which was next door to the Place of the Queen Mother. In the rear courtyard, I often observed across the dividing wall the young Princess--of 4 or 5 years with her nurse attendant. On more than one occasion I got into conversation with the matron and since she had a much better command of English than I had of the Hollander tongue. I was given introduction to the young Princess. In due course she was in the habit of hailing me as "Mynheer Photograph".

Colonel Davis, the chief Military Attache officer intreated me to remain with him and aspire to the Counselor Service of the U. S. Gov't, that shortly the staff would move to Berlin, and that it would prove an interesting and affluent career. I was homesick and begged off. My outfit back in the Pathe Factory had already gone home when I was routed back for eventually transport to the U. S. A. I was able to join with the very rag-tag end of the lab. staff and were shipped out to Brest. Here we were able to get aboard the George Washington transport with a contingent of the 2nd. Divsn. Landed at N. Y. without anything eventful except to have my prized collection of photo prints pilfered on board.

Discharged at Washington D. C. August, 1919.

Sincerely *Fred F. M. Arnold*